

Abolitionists and the Underground Railroad

Goal:

Students will brainstorm ways to organize against slavery and will learn about the abolitionist movement.

Purpose:

Students become aware of the risks taken by fugitive slaves and the people who helped them, while gaining an understanding of the goals, actions, and symbols of the abolitionist movement.

Materials:

Chart paper or projection/transparency with 3 guiding questions (What are the goals of your anti-slavery group? What will you actually do to reach these goals? Will your group have a name, and if so, what name will you choose and why?)

Abolitionist Student Worksheets

Standards Correlation:

Common Core State Standards Correlation :Common Core Standards for ELA and Common Core Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects

****Note:** Standards listed are extrapolated from Grades 9-10 CC History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects; the lessons can be adapted for grades 7-12, refer to corresponding standards for your particular grade level.

CCRH (9-10).2 Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of how key events or ideas develop over the course of the text.

CCRH (9-10).8 Assess the extent to which the reasoning and evidence in a text support the author's claims.

CCSL (9-10).1 Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 9–10 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively

Before the Lesson:

- Have charts/projections/transparencies with 3 guiding questions ready, but not yet displayed. (What are the goals of your anti-slavery group? What will you actually do to reach these goals? Will your group have a name, and if so, what name will you choose and why?)
- Have a plan for getting the students into cooperative groups (3-4 students per group). Each group will have a recorder and a presenter.

- Make enough copies of the Student Fact Sheet for every student.

Steps:

- 1) Engage: *The Underground Railroad was a reaction to the rise of slavery in this country. Africans were brutally captured from their homeland, they endured the Middle Passage across the Atlantic Ocean and life as enslaved people in America. Both free and enslaved Africans in America made significant contributions from the very beginning of our country's history, all through the time in our history when slavery was legal in this country, and have continued contributing to our country's history today.*

I am going to ask you a series of questions, and I want you to just silently think of the answers on your own. You will have a chance to share with others in your group in a little while. Now put yourself back into that time, and ask yourself the question: What would you do? How would you feel about slavery? Would you DO anything about it? Could you DO anything about it? Would you be more successful doing something about it as an individual or as a group?

Allow students time to think quietly about these questions. Have them share with a partner and then ask students to share with the whole class. Accept all supported responses. Then display the 3 guiding questions for the class.

*Your team will be forming an anti-slavery group during the early 1800s. Please take some time to discuss the following questions, and the **recorder** of the group will write down the group's answers after you have reached agreement. **Questions:** What are the goals of your group? What will you actually do to reach these goals? Will your group have a name, and if so, what name will you choose and why?*

The teacher should give the groups time and monitor their progress. Each group's **presenter** will share the group's responses with the class. The teacher can have each group present all 3 answers at once, or could call on each group to share one goal, then one action in random order; and then ask each group to share their group name, if they chose to have one, and explain the reasoning behind their choice. The teacher facilitates a Socratic dialogue by prompting students to further think about and support their goals and actions, and even group names. The teacher lists the ideas generated by the groups on the board or on chart paper under the headings of: GOALS, ACTIONS, and GROUP NAMES. Hopefully, students will generate many ideas about how to enact a change in the state of things with regard to slavery.

- 2) Abolitionist Student Worksheet: Pass the student worksheet out to each student. Have them read the information and answer the questions on their own. Each student should complete their own sheet, but the teacher could allow them to confer with their anti-slavery group for assistance.

- 3) Closing: Allow students to get with a partner to share their answers from the worksheet. Then have a whole class discussion on the last three questions from the student worksheet: **Would you still be willing to help? Would you be willing to take the risk? Why or why not?**

Suggestions for Formal Evaluation:

- Students write a persuasive letter, trying to convince the South that slavery is wrong and should be abolished.
- Students write a persuasive letter to a friend or someone that they know, and try to convince them to join the abolitionists.
- The teacher has students imagine that they have been approached several times by abolitionists wanting them to join their fight, but recently there have been many people in this anti-slavery struggle who have been fined, jailed, and recently a group of anti-abolitionists turned violent and burned down Pennsylvania Hall (an abolitionist building in Philadelphia). Students have to write a letter telling the abolitionists whether or not they will join them and explain their reasoning.

Extending and Enriching the Learning...

Further Study of the Liberty Bell

Teachers may find it helpful to use the Liberty Bell lesson plans available on the park's website (www.nps.gov/INDE/) to extend their students' knowledge about the Liberty Bell. The Liberty Bell is discussed in this lesson in the context of being given its name and used as a symbol by the abolitionists. These resources and activities would assist students in knowing more about the Bell before their site visit to Independence National Historical Park.



Quest for Freedom: The Underground Railroad

Name of your Anti-Slavery Group: _____

Your name: _____

Names of other Group Members: _____

There were people who believed that slavery was wrong right from the beginning, and were looking for different ways to ABOLISH it. Since these people wanted to abolish (or end) slavery, they became known as the **abolitionists** and they tried to do many of the things that you and your teams talked about doing. They joined together in groups called abolitionist societies and tried to change the laws by changing people's minds about slavery. But often the laws were slow to change, and slavery was growing in the South. Abolitionists relied on the POWER OF WORDS through books, essays, pamphlets, making speeches, and other activities; all with the ultimate goal of CHANGING people's minds, and they relied on using SYMBOLS, too.

Question: Did you and your team come up with any of the things that the abolitionists really did? What were they? List them here:

In the 1830s, many abolitionists were visiting Philadelphia or living there and they were starting to visit the Pennsylvania State House where the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution were created, and where the State House Bell was on display. This Bell had an inscription (words written on it) from the Bible: "Proclaim LIBERTY throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof". They decided to use this Bell that had hung in the State House when the founders declared that "all men are created equal" as a symbol for FREEDOM for those who still were not equal and did not have any liberty in America: the enslaved Africans. They began printing images of the Bell on their writings, and they renamed it The Liberty Bell.

Question: Why did the abolitionists need a symbol, like the Liberty Bell, for their anti-slavery cause? What difference could a bell make in their fight to end slavery? _____



As time passed, some (not all) abolitionists decided that the only way to free the slaves would be to actually FREE the slaves: to help them to escape from Southern plantations and travel to the northern states, and later to Canada or Mexico. People had been helping **fugitive** slaves (enslaved Africans who ran away to be free), and slaves had been running away on their own since the beginning. But now the effort became more organized and more extensive. This organized effort to assist fugitive slaves to escape became known as **the Underground Railroad**. The Underground Railroad is the network of all routes and all people who helped enslaved Africans escape from slavery to freedom. Remember: slavery was LEGAL in the southern states, south of the Mason-Dixon Line that divided Pennsylvania and Maryland. By the mid-1800s, slavery was against the law in the northern states. So you would think that as long as escaped slaves made it to the North, they would be free. But it wasn't that simple. There were Fugitive Slave laws that said that people in the north were not LEGALLY allowed to help fugitive slaves. Southern slave owners considered slaves their property, and they thought that anyone who helped fugitive slaves to escape was a thief. Because of these laws, anyone who helped an enslaved African to escape could go to jail (and be separated from their family, and probably lose their job) and had to pay a fine (as much as \$500 or \$1000) for breaking the law, so helping slaves to escape was a very dangerous thing to do.

Question: Would you still be willing to help? Would you be willing to take the risk? Why or why not? _____



Quest for Freedom: The Underground Railroad

Underground Railroad Resources for Teachers

Print Resources

African Americans in Pennsylvania: Above Ground and Underground: An Illustrated Guide. Charles L. Blockson. (RB Books, 2001).

Bound for the North Star: True Stories of Fugitive Slaves. Dennis Brindell Fradin. (Houghton Mifflin, 2000).

Freedom Roads: Searching for the Underground Railroad. Joyce Hanson, Gary McGowan, & James Ransome. (Cricket Books, 2003).

Freedom Train: The Story of Harriet Tubman. Dorothy Sterling. (Scholastic, 1991).

North by Night: A Story of the Underground Railroad. Katherine Ayres. (Yearling Books, 2000).

Stealing South. Katherine Ayres. (Yearling Books, 2002).

The Underground Railroad. Bial, Raymond. (Houghton-Mifflin, 1999).

True North: A Novel of the Underground Railroad. Kathryn Lasky. (Scholastic, 1998).

Underground Railroad in Pennsylvania. William J. Switala. (Stackpole Books, 2001).

Web Resources

The National Park Service Underground Railroad Web Site

<http://www.nps.gov/subjects/ugrr/education/index.htm>

The History Channel's Underground Railroad Web Site

<http://www.historychannel.com/exhibits/undergroundrr/story.html>

Library of Congress African American Odyssey Web Site

<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/aahtml/aohome.html>

National Geographic Underground Railroad Simulation Web Site

<http://www.nationalgeographic.com/railroad/j1.html>

National Underground Railroad Freedom Center

<http://www.freedomcenter.org>

PBS Underground Railroad-Africans in America Web Site

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part4/4p2944.html>

NASA Web Site that explains the meaning of the song Follow the Drinking Gourd

<http://quest.arc.nasa.gov/lrc/special/mlk/gourd2.html>